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Italians issue arrest warrant for Abu Nidal

FROM COMBINED DISPATCHES

Italian authorities issued an arrest warrant yesterday for Mohammed Abu Nidal, the alleged mastermind of last month's Rome and Vienna airport massacres, quickening the tempo of recent actions taken by Western European governments against terrorism.

And in Brussels yesterday, U.S. special presidential envoy John Whitehead called on reluctant European Community foreign ministers to take a strong stand against terrorist violence and Libya when they meet on Monday.

But Deputy Secretary of State Whitehead said he did not expect the Europeans to follow to the letter Washington's lead in imposing economic sanctions against Libya, which is seen by President Reagan as a sponsor of international terrorism.

The Italian announcement also came after the Austrian government had announced a series of measures earlier this week in a crackdown against international terrorism.

The Italian warrant, signed by prosecutor Domenico Sica, charges Abu Nidal with mass murder in the Dec. 27 raid at Rome's Leonardo da Vinci Airport that left 16 people dead and 80 wounded. The dead included three of the four suspected Palestinian terrorists and five Americans.

Three other people were killed in a simultaneous attack by terrorists at the airport in Vienna, Austria, including one of the three alleged terrorists. About 40 were wounded in Vienna.

Abu Nidal broke away from Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization in 1974 and leads a small band of guerrillas who have attacked Israelis, Westerners and Arafat loyalists. He is thought to be in his late 40s or early 50s.

Mohammed Sarham, identified as the lone surviving terrorist in the Rome airport attack, reportedly told Mr. Sica that the Palestinian commandos who staged the twin Rome and Vienna raids belonged to Abu Nidal's group.

Mr. Sica issued the warrant after examining police reports on the

attacks and three weeks of interrogating Mr. Sarham, the authorities said.

Abu Nidal was reported to have been in Baghdad several weeks ago.

He has been blamed for several attacks, including the June 1982 assassination attempt on Israeli Ambassador to Britain Shlomo Argov, which was stated by Israel as the reason for its 1982 invasion of Lebanon.

Yesterday in West Germany, investigators raised the possibility that Arab terrorists, possibly Abu Nidal's group, planted a bomb that devastated a U.S. military shopping center in Frankfurt two months ago.

The key clue in the Nov. 24 attack, which wounded 35 people, was a Moroccan passport like those believed used by the Rome airport gunmen.

Hans-Werner Kuehn, deputy chief of the federal police anti-terrorism unit, pointed out the parallel in an Associated Press interview. Added investigator Heinz Doebla, "We cannot say for sure now that the Abu Nidal group was the author of that crime. It is possible."

Speaking at a news conference on the penultimate leg of an eight-nation European tour, Mr. Whitehead said: "We hope the EC meeting will result in a strong stand against terrorism, particularly against Qaddafi's terrorism," a reference to Libyan leader Col. Muammar Qaddafi.

"I don't expect a large number of specific measures but some participation in this fight," he said, adding, "If we do not stand together, we shall grieve together."

Washington's European allies have shown little inclination so far to follow the U.S. lead in imposing sanctions against Libya after charging it with responsibility for last month's attacks on Vienna and Rome airports.

President Reagan ordered a ban on trade with Libya, a freeze of Libyan funds in the United States and the withdrawal of all U.S. citizens from Libya. But most European allies have said economic boycotts are ineffective and that Libya should not be singled out for criticism.

Mr. Whitehead, who has already visited Ankara, Athens, Bonn, Lon-

don, Paris and Rome, admitted his tour had not produced tangible results.

"But I am optimistic the trip would in time produce results. We did not expect immediate announcements," he said.

Economic Community diplomats said the ministers were likely to strongly condemn the growth of terrorism and pledge to join in worldwide efforts to combat such violence, which they believe could undermine Middle East peace bids.

But it was uncertain whether they would be able to agree on a common ban on arms sales to Libya, the only field in which they could follow the U.S. lead, the diplomats added.

In recent days the Italian government has announced that it would impose new visa restrictions on visitors from Tunisia, Libya and Morocco. Italian Prime Minister Bettino Craxi has also stated that Italy would stop selling advanced arms to Libya.

In a series of measures announced Tuesday, Austria said it would also tighten its visa restrictions from Arab countries, including diplomats.

Ray Cline, former deputy director of the CIA, said the Italian and Austrian initiatives were "symbolic." The former government official stressed that "they both made a modest rhetorical and political change, but the efforts will not mean a great deal," he said.

"Don't underestimate symbolism," he said. "Terrorism is largely psychological."

Staff writer Bill Kritzberg contributed to this report.